





*The Higher Education and  
Employment of the Blind*

BY

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WRITER TO HER MAJESTY'S SIGNET

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## P R E F A C E.

THE following pages formed a paper read in the Educational Section of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science at its meeting in Manchester, in October 1879. They are now published by request, and by permission, in the hope that by bringing the important subject on which they treat more prominently before the public, their interest in and practical sympathy with the Higher Education and Employment of the Blind may be more generally secured.

MERCHISTON, EDINBURGH,

*November 1879.*

THE EDINBURGH SOCIETY FOR GIVING HIGHER EDUCATION TO THE BLIND OF SCOTLAND *are prepared to assist Friends in other districts in Scotland to send Blind young persons of suitable age and acquirements to the ROYAL NORMAL COLLEGE AND ACADEMY OF MUSIC FOR THE BLIND, UPPER NORWOOD, LONDON, where the benefits referred to in the accompanying Pamphlet can be secured. They have already assisted in this way boys from Aberdeen, Kelso, Perth, and Arbroath. The cases on pages 8, 9, and 10, and in the Appendix, are specially referred to.*

Contributions, Donations, and Legacies  
are earnestly solicited.

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## FORM OF LEGACY.

*I leave and bequeath to JOHN GIFFORD, Esq., or to the Treasurer for the time being of the EDINBURGH SOCIETY FOR GIVING HIGHER EDUCATION TO THE BLIND OF SCOTLAND in connection with the ROYAL NORMAL COLLEGE AND ACADEMY OF MUSIC FOR THE BLIND, UPPER NORWOOD, LONDON, for the use and behoof of the said Society, the sum of [insert sum in words].*

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## THE HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT OF THE BLIND.

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It is computed that in the United Kingdom there are upwards of 30,000 blind persons. Of these it may safely be said that the majority are objects of charity; at all events, are not self-supporting. That this should be so is wrong in a social point of view, because if they are capable of earning their livelihood in any way whatever, it is manifest that it is the duty of the community in the first place to provide the machinery by which blind persons can be educated or trained so as to be self-supporting; and secondly, when so trained, to see to it that those occupations for which they are specially qualified shall always be filled by them. This is no less a charitable than a self-interested point of view, inasmuch as the rates

will be so much increased for the support of the pauper blind who are not trained to be self-supporting.

It is now not a thing unknown that there are employments in which blind persons are competent not only to obtain their livelihood but also to excel in them. These are teachers of music, pianists, organists, and tuners of pianos. There have been rare examples of men who as poets, lawyers, politicians, mathematicians, and preachers, have filled with credit and profit to themselves, and usefulness to others, these various professions; but it is not in such fields that there is hope of a future for the blind in any numbers, but rather among those occupations first named. It has been well put by M. Gaudet, Chief of the Imperial Institution of the Young Blind of Paris, when he says, ' Whenever an art or trade is of such a nature ' that the blind can follow it on equal terms with ' the seeing, or, in other words, that there is a ' peculiarity in it which causes a disappearance ' of the inequality generally existing between ' them, this art or trade is especially well suited ' to the blind, and it is our duty to teach it with ' as little delay as possible. Now in pianoforte-tuning the blind are not inferior to the seeing,



‘ but on the contrary possess certain advantages  
‘ over them : we must therefore train tuners.  
‘ There is no fear of the demand ceasing : there-  
‘ fore we must train as many tuners as circum-  
‘ stances will permit.’

In the report of the Perkins Institution at Boston, U.S., we find the following :—‘ The  
‘ teaching of music and playing is now the  
‘ largest single field open to the blind as  
‘ a means of support, and it seems to be  
‘ growing larger. People are becoming more  
‘ disposed to employ them ; and as they go  
‘ forth from the school they have more and  
‘ more ground of hope that they will find  
‘ opportunities to earn their living in this way.  
‘ The whole tone of mind among the musical  
‘ pupils has been changed. Instead of looking  
‘ forward to the future with fear and anxiety,  
‘ they now feel a well-grounded confidence in  
‘ themselves.’

Mr. Liebreich, in his report to the ex-  
Empress of the French, says of Parisian blind  
tuners :—‘ Tuners begin ordinarily to work with  
‘ piano-manufacturers, and earn easily 1500  
‘ francs per annum. If a little later they  
‘ succeed in obtaining a town connection they  
‘ have no difficulty in earning that or more.

‘ Some have even succeeded in uniting manufacture with tuning. The organists, by obtaining places in churches, and by giving music lessons, very soon earn a good livelihood.

‘ In short, the tuners, organists, and teachers have, in spite of their infirmity, become independent men, exercising honourable and lucrative professions; some have married and reared families, others have come to the aid of their indigent relatives. Very different is the lot of the blind workmen, who by toiling without relaxation many more hours than sighted workmen, barely succeed in gaining a part of what they need to support themselves.’

In ten years before 1875, 110 male pupils left the Institution in Paris, of whom satisfactory accounts were received. Of 166,—108 having received a good education, were insured an easy and independent living; 56 having received an elementary training, were not put beyond charity.

It may be as well to say here in passing, that till recently in this country, as a rule, the blind have been encouraged to seek their employment solely in such occupations as basket-making, brush-making, etc., and that those best

competent to speak on this subject state—and in this they agree with the Parisian experience—that it is impossible for them to earn a proper livelihood in such trades, and that therefore their means of subsistence must be supplemented by the rates or the purse of the benevolent. In other countries, such as America and France however, for years past, as we have already seen, very many blind persons have been able to make a proper livelihood as piano-tuners, etc., and in Paris we are told that about 30 per cent. of the male pupils obtain their diploma as tuners, and that these are all certain of success, meaning by this, that they are able, upon an average, to earn about £100 per annum.

In Boston, U.S., though the blind are successful as tuners and organists, it is found that they often earn more as teachers of music. There the proportion of success among the pupils is higher than in Paris, and the average earnings are greater.

And in our own country now, we can tell of many isolated cases where blind persons of good character, and well trained, make a sufficient income for their support as teachers and tuners.

As tuners we find them employed both in music-shops as stock tuners, and on their own account in private families. Of the former class, we find Mr. Ramsden of Leeds writing as to a youth<sup>1</sup> of about twenty in his employment :—‘ I have much pleasure in stating that ‘ the blind tuner, who came to me in April last, ‘ has given me the greatest satisfaction. He ‘ has charge of my pianos indoors. He tunes ‘ well, and gets through his work in a satisfactory ‘ manner.’ This young man, at the date of the above extract, had a self-supporting wage of eighteen shillings a week, with the prospect of a rise in improved times.

Messrs. Swan and Pentland of Glasgow certify to the great satisfaction a blind tuner<sup>1</sup> gives, whose employment was at a self-supporting wage.

Of the latter class we find eminent teachers of singing and the piano in Edinburgh, viz., Messrs. A. W. Smith and Hately, certifying to the work of a pianist and tuner<sup>1</sup> resident in Edinburgh, and pursuing his vocation there. Mr. Smith writes : ‘ I hereby certify that Mr. ‘ John Inglis<sup>1</sup> has tuned my semi-grand piano-

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<sup>1</sup> Trained at the College at Upper Norwood, London ; sent by Edinburgh Society.

‘ forte to my entire satisfaction, and I have  
‘ great pleasure in recommending him as a  
‘ first-class tuner.’

Mr. Hately says : ‘ I have every confidence  
‘ in recommending Mr. Inglis as an efficient  
‘ tuner. He has kept my piano in tune during  
‘ the past session to my entire satisfaction.’

This young man is employed regularly as tuner by about sixty of the best families in Edinburgh, and he only requires to be better known, and a larger clientèle, to make him entirely self-supporting, with, for his position, a large income.

As pianists, organists, and teachers, both of music and other branches too, we have the following cases recorded. A teacher of music<sup>1</sup> from Bideford writes : ‘ I have seven new  
‘ pupils. My income at present averages from  
‘ £2 to £2, 10s. a week, and is still on the  
‘ increase. The profit on concerts is not in-  
‘ cluded, as I consider that apart from my  
‘ regular income.’

Another blind teacher of the piano in Dumfriesshire has for long had more teaching offered him than he could undertake, and is very

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<sup>1</sup> Trained at the College at Upper Norwood, London.

highly thought of. He makes a sufficient income to support not only himself, but also a widow whom he married, with her six children.

Two blind young ladies<sup>1</sup> have lately been appointed to be teachers in connection with the London School Board, at self-supporting salaries.

From what has now been said, I trust it is sufficiently patent that blind persons can be trained to be, not only not burdens in the land, but useful members of society, capable of finding a name and place in the community, and helping to help others. There are rare exceptions, where, by force of will and indomitable perseverance and energy, they can solely by their own exertions and efforts attain that position. But such is not, and cannot be allowed to be, the rule. It is not so among those who are gifted with all their faculties. Nay, it is by reason of various appliances and means to boot that the most highly endowed have at last reached the pinnacle of wealth, name, and fame, if such be the objects of their ambition. And if we provide schools, colleges, bursaries, fellow-

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<sup>1</sup> Trained at the College at Upper Norwood, London; one sent by Edinburgh Society.



ships, for the seeing, shall we not likewise care for the blind in a similar manner?

And this leads me to speak of the machinery by which the higher education and training of the blind has been and must be attained. And at the outset let me say that in order to secure the desired result, persons of good moral parts themselves, and of good moral families, should be obtained, and the very greatest pains must be taken with their higher mental culture, as well as with their moral and religious well-being. For these ends, therefore, men and women of high mental culture and noble moral tone should be had, whose whole soul is bent in bringing to perfection the training and education of those to whom they have devoted their life's best energies.

The educational and other appliances too must be of the very best kind. The best books must be printed in the type peculiar to the blind. Models and maps of all kinds suitable for their manipulation, organs, pianos, and other musical instruments, should be procured. Concerts and musical performances of high-class music should be attended, and lectures on musical composition and authors given by men of culture and note. Nor should gymnastic

exercises and out-door sports of all kinds be in any wise neglected. Nay, everything that can be devised to make the body and mind independent and self-reliant should be adopted, and with such results to be attained, no money or labour should be grudged in procuring what is needful. Institutions having all that is necessary in this way have been in existence in America, in the Perkins Institution in Boston there, and in Paris, for several years. And in 1872 the Royal Normal College and Academy of Music for the Blind, Upper Norwood, London, was opened, under Mr. F. J. Campbell, formerly of America, as Principal. Under his wise and energetic labours, results hitherto unattained in this country have been procured; and now there annually issue from that Institution many blind persons possessing the necessary knowledge, culture, and skill to enable them to maintain themselves, and be useful in the business and battle of life. The Institution is under Royal patronage, and last summer the prizes were delivered, in presence of a company composed of the wise and good of the land, by Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales.

The Rev. J. Rice Byrne, one of Her



Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, in a recent report upon the Institution, says : ' The College continues to extend and improve steadily from year to year, thanks in the main to the genius and energy of the one individual who is the moving spirit of it. In the interest of education I cordially wish it success, and sincerely hope that before long it may be found practicable so far to relax the conditions of the Code of Elementary Education as to include within its scope institutions for the instruction of the blind, so that the benefit of an annual Government inspection and a Government grant may be conferred on a College like this, which does so much for one of the most necessitous classes of the community. At present it is only the accident of an immense misfortune which defeats, as it were, the intention of the Legislature, by excluding them from their full share of that "sum of money which is annually granted by "Parliament for Public Education."<sup>1</sup>

But it is vain for the benevolent to build such Institutions, and be at the expense of supporting blind persons in them, and of such

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<sup>1</sup> Art. I., New Code.

blind persons to spend years of their life in acquiring skill in their particular vocation, if the community at large do not realise that they have a duty in the matter, and therefore I close this paper with a few remarks bearing upon this subject.

It appears to me to be a duty to employ the skilled blind in the callings they profess. They are certified as good pianists, organists, teachers, and tuners, and therefore many openings are, or should be, before them,—in fact, a business large enough to meet all their wants, if only it could be obtained for them. It may safely be said that almost every householder of £20 and upwards has a voice in this matter, and can lend a helping hand to secure that his brother man shall not beg, but earn his daily bread. We all need pianos tuned—our children taught to play. The organ or harmonium must be played for service. A pianist is necessary for our social gatherings, and many of our coffee-houses, bazaars, etc., would be all the better of musical entertainments, which blind musicians could furnish. It only requires public opinion to be roused in favour of what undoubtedly is the wiser course in the treatment of the blind, and all prejudice to be set aside, to command

that success which is a duty to ourselves and to our fellow-men. The rates of the country would in the long-run be lessened, and many a cheerless man and woman brought to appreciate the sunshine of a lightened because an independent spirit—a spirit which asks not to be pitied or helped, but taught how to help itself, and the opportunity afforded to it of doing this.

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#### APPENDIX.

SINCE the foregoing was written, Mr. John Inglis—previously referred to at p. 8,—who was trained at the College in London, gave a Morning Concert in the Masonic Hall, Edinburgh, in which he was assisted by professional and amateur artistes. In noticing the concert the *Daily Review* of 20th October 1879 says:—

A most enjoyable and interesting concert was given in the Masonic Hall on Saturday afternoon, by Mr. John Inglis, from the Royal Normal College for the Blind, London. Mr. Inglis began his education at the Gayfield Square School, Edinburgh (now amalgamated with the Royal Blind Asylum), under Mr. and Mrs. M'Culloch, in 1868, when he was eight years old, and remained as a pupil of that excellent institution till 1872, when he was sent to London. He has now returned to Edinburgh to adopt the musical profession, the result of his training being such as to justify such a choice. Mr. Inglis had a favourable reception on Saturday from a large audience. He appeared in the double capacity of pianist and composer, and acquitted himself admirably. The first of Mr. Inglis' solos was a 'Romanza,' by Schumann. In this piece he was heard to less advantage than in any

other on the programme. It wanted the colouring essential to bring out the character of the music ; but in the succeeding 'Concertstück,' by Meyer, and, in short, in all his other pieces, Mr. Inglis showed himself possessed of a wonderfully firm touch for one of his years, and also no ordinary degree of musical feeling. This was especially observable in his playing of an 'Impromptu,' by Chopin, and 'Spinnlied,' by Litolf. No. 1 of 'Drei Humoresken,' by E. Grieg, was only remarkable for its eccentricity and Mr. Inglis' ability to remember the unusual chords and phrasing of which it consisted. An 'Impromptu Reverie' in A flat, and Waltzes in various keys, the composition of Mr. Inglis, concluded the programme. The 'Impromptu' is a short, interesting *morceau* with a florid beginning and ending in quick time, the second movement being an *adagio* with a quaint melody resembling some old Highland airs. The Waltzes did not impress us with originality, but in this work Mr. Inglis will doubtless improve. Several other *artistes* assisted in the concert. Signora Fabroni delighted the audience with her harp performances, and she also sang Cowell's ballad, 'The Lonely Harp,' with much finish of style. Miss Simpson received an encore for her rendering of 'La Habanera,' from 'Carmen.' Mr. Glennie, an amateur with a tenor voice of fair quality, sang 'Bella adorata incognita,' by Mercadante, and took part with the two ladies in the terzetto 'Angiol di Pace.' Mr. Adam Longmore, an amateur *basso profundo*, sang Pinsuti's song, 'I fear no foe,' and 'The Fog Bell,' by Pontet. Mr. Bridgman was an efficient accompanist.

The *Scotsman* of the same date in its notice of the concert says :—

Mr. Inglis himself played several pianoforte solos, including numbers presenting considerable difficulties, with creditable ability, his fingering, notwithstanding the physical disadvantage he has to overcome, being remarkably accurate, and his command of the instrument in all respects being indeed surprising.



